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Testimony to the Appropriations Committee Regarding the Budget and the Elimination of Funding for the Centers for Independent Living

My name is Sharon Denson and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Business Leadership Network, a coalition of businesses committed to the hiring of people with disabilities. All of our members are seeking to hire qualified individuals with disabilities while our members who are federal contractors are required to hire individuals with disabilities. Effective March 2014, Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act was revised from a non-discrimination regulation to an affirmative action regulation. In other words, federal contractors and subcontractors doing an aggregate of \$10,000.00 or more in business with the federal government must actively seek to hire and retain individuals with disabilities in the workplace and reach of target of 7% of their employees to be individuals with disabilities

At CTBLN, we work with these companies to teach them best practices in hiring individuals with disabilities and connecting them with organizations like the Centers for Independent Living as sources for candidates. Our federal contractors are under the gun as OFCCP begins its series of audits.

Taking away the funding from one of these valuable resources of qualified individuals with disabilities is hurting the companies which financially support our state through direct taxes and taxes paid by their employees, the creation of businesses which support these businesses and taxes generated by these businesses and their employees.

In addition, we are watching businesses leave Connecticut for a more friendly business environment in other states and countries. When businesses leave they take job opportunities and tax revenue with them. We are in a severe deficit and it is urgent that we create a friendly environment for our businesses by supporting the Independent Living Centers. Businesses stay or are attracted to a location which offers among other things a tax friendly environment and a strong pool of talent. The many federal contractors in our state are required to tap into a talent pool which includes individuals with disabilities. Cutting the funding to one of those talent sources is a step in creating a less than friendly environment for our businesses and fewer supports for individuals with disabilities who want to enter the workforce. Businesses bring in tax dollars. Employed people with disabilities bring in tax dollars and decrease spending on income benefits.

The small investment which the state makes in the centers for independent living has a positive ripple effect on both our business community and the individuals with disabilities who want to be employed by those businesses.

We need to do everything possible to support the creation of the talent pool required by the businesses in our state so that they want to stay in Connecticut.

Put the Centers for Independent Living back into the budget and everyone benefits. It is a small investment with great returns.